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## Marching Towards Civvy Street: Exploring Liminality and Gendered Identities Among Ex-Military Personnel

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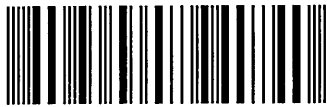
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Submitted in support of: Master of Research

Marching Towards Civvy Street: Exploring Liminality and Gendered  
Identities Among Ex-military Personnel

(Exploring liminality in transitioning military personnel)

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Caroline Micklewright BA (Hons) MSc

The Open University

Faculty of Business and Law

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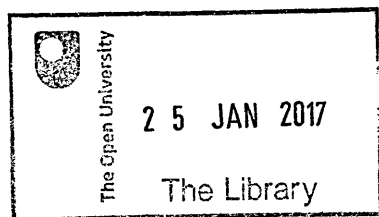
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## Abstract

This research will explore processes of identity construction and liminality in women and men who are in the process of leaving the Royal Air Force. Individuals who are in the process of leaving the RAF have been interviewed in order to explore liminal themes as they adapt their perception of identity during transition from the military, a recognised masculine organisation, to Civvy Street. Using narrative analysis military identity and gender will be explored to further understanding of liminality and the long term effects of a total institution.

*Keywords:* Total Institutions, Liminality, Royal Air Force, Identity, Gender.



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I would like to thank my husband, my parents, my in-laws and my children for the support and help they have given me so that I could write this dissertation. I would also like to thank the participants who so willingly shared their experiences, I hope I have done you justice.

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## Chapter One

### Aims and Objectives

This research project aims to explore liminality, when “a person is in between two identity constructs” (Beech, 2010 p. 286), in military personnel using a combination of semi-structured interviews and autoethnography as they and I transition (seen as a process) from life within the Royal Air Force (RAF) to *Civvy Street*<sup>1</sup>. Additionally as the military presents a masculine organizational environment (Priola and Brannan, 2009) particular attention will be paid to gender as this may result in different considerations for individuals as they experience liminality. Gender is not seen in an organic sense here as a male/female binary but rather as “socially produced pattern of meanings that distinguish the masculine from the feminine” (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008, p.7). The project will explore liminality in the context of Goffman’s Total Institution (TI), where “all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority” (Goffman, 1961, p. 17). Encompassing eating, working, sleeping and playing how the totality of such a regime effects identity, “the meanings attached to the self” (Gecas, 1982, p. 10) during a period of transition from one world to another will be studied. Throughout identity is not regarded as static but as fluid or multiple with individuals fluctuating between more than one identity at any one time, for example a serving officer and a parent.

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<sup>1</sup> A colloquial term for the civilian world outside of the military environment.

The objective is to further understanding of both liminality and identity against a TI in this case the RAF. It is argued here that military personnel's concept of their own identity is contingent on both their belonging to a TI and their ability to set themselves apart from the 'other', in this case civilians. Whilst recognizing participant's experiences of liminality will not be homogenous the hope is to enable military personnel to freely voice concerns regarding the challenges of transition into civilian life, and how the military structure effects individual identity, especially in regards to gender, both as a condition and a consequence of military life. Common elements identified can in turn be shared with other leavers in an effort to ease passage through what can be a challenging period (Bryne & Theakston, 2015) and expand organization theory by exploring the effects of a TI on identity.

#### **List of questions to be addressed by the research**

The aim will be to address the following research questions:

1. What kinds of 'identity work' are enacted by individuals as they prepare to leave the military?
2. When re-entering Civvy Street, what are the effects of longstanding membership of a TI such as the RAF and how does this shape the process of reconfiguring 'new' identities?
3. What approaches are adopted by military personnel to ameliorate what they consider to be the most challenging aspects of ending their service career and re-entering civilian life?



## Rationale

The rationale behind this study is two-fold. Firstly there is a gap in the understanding of UK military personnel and their liminal experiences in relation to identity (Higate, 2001). Although research has started to address this gap with Woodward and Jenkins, (2011) and Thornborrow and Brown, (2009), focusing aspects of identity and Walker, (2012) studying soldiers leaving the military the research favours the Army. Research into policy regarding gender and diversity also focuses on the Army (Woodward and Winter, 2004, 2006). As the largest of the 3 services this Army centric view is understandable. However historically the RAF has had a larger female contingent than its sister services (13.9% compared to Army 9% and Royal Navy's (RN) 9.3% (Gov.uk 2015)) making the RAF a fertile area for gender research.

Studies exclusive to the RAF, such as Stone's (1999) research into women during WWII are historical and tri-service research such as Burdett et al, (2012) study into how ex-service personnel identify with the term 'veterans' have recognised limitations in respect of depth and scale. A significant body of work exists into the mental and physical health of service and ex-service personnel (Hatch et al, 2013, Verey et al, 2016) ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system (Treadwell, 2010) and military masculinities (Hale, 2011). However they tend to be positivist in nature, lack contextuality and homogenise the services (the RN and RAF are considered more technically advanced than the Army requiring different skill sets from personnel (Moskos, 1977)). Even when a Tri-Service<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force.

perspective is presented into post military lives there is a failure to consider an institutional or gendered view (Herman and Yarwood, 2014) with women, especially mothers, remaining an understudied research area (Barnes et al. 2016). One of the aims of this research is to further explore female identity during the liminal experience and expand understanding of organizational theory in respect of TIs from a gendered perspective.

An extensive body of work exists within US academia; female leadership (Walker, K. 2012), reservist identity, (Griffith, 2009) and women in combat (King, 2014). Unfortunately this is not always applicable to the UK due in part to US' concepts of economic freedom and civil liberties which are not necessarily shared by the UK (Kurth, 2010). However, where UK research is not available and US research provides useful insight it will be utilised.

Public perception and support are seen as crucial to the maintenance of moral, recruitment and how leavers' transition to civilian life yet the public are reported to lack understanding of the military despite holding it in high regard and respecting its professionalism (Hines et al. 2014). A recognised lack of contact between the military and civilians demonstrated through the lack of uniformed personnel visible in everyday life is a potential physical representation of Civil Military Relations (CMR) and the gap between the values of the military and wider society. This gap is manifested in a postmodern mindset where autonomy is highly valued and authority questioned, thus potential recruits are not willing to commit to military service or recognise the physicality it requires (Dandeker and Strachan, 1993, Woodward and Winter, 2004, Nielsen, 2012). A strong CMR can

result in successful military operations such as peace support and assistance in natural disasters which can provide an upsurge in public support towards both government and military (Bruneau and Matei, 2008).

In summary a lack of public awareness could result in military personnel facing unique challenges to identity as they experience liminality. With fewer members of society having experienced service life and a smaller potentially more isolated military maintaining strong links between the nation and the military (Woodward and Winter, 2004) ensures the military can recruit effectively (Segal, 1995). Skills developed throughout a military career, often unappreciated (MacLean, 2016), can be reused to societal advantage and veterans may not become a burden to the society they once served (van Staden et al, 2007).

The second dimension of this research is personal. Having left the military in December 2013 after 16 years' service I am experiencing liminality first-hand. Many friends and colleagues are similarly going through the leaving process supported by resettlement courses<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless many individuals find the decision to leave difficult resulting in a confusing mixture of relief and anxiety (Walker, 2012). Higate, himself a veteran and military sociologist, calls for more autoethnographic accounts and reflexivity in this area.

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<sup>3</sup> Resettlement is a Tri-Service process which automatically starts two years before a person leaves the Armed Services. Personnel are afforded opportunities for re-training, CV development and offered assistance with issues surrounding housing, education, pensions etc.

“Our argument is that knowledge is produced in specific social circumstances that shape it in some way, and acknowledgement of this complex social process offers greater potential for both transparency and, ultimately, accountability in the research process” (Higate and Cameron, 2006).

Such a reflexive approach is unusual in military research which tends to be dominated by a positivist epistemological position in part to satisfy the requirements of the policy makers. With this in mind I will attempt to be reflexive throughout the research, the aim is not an attempt at objectiveness but rather “transparency, honesty, and openness” as called for by Higate and Cameron, (2006). This reflexivity combined with vignettes detailing my own experiences will complement the empirical evidence from participants providing a deep understanding of the liminal experience, and the effects of a TI on identity. Bakhtin, (1984) believed discourse cannot be studied outside of its culture. For this reason, as a RAF veteran I feel I can translate the liminal experiences of military personnel for a wider audience. In this vein a short autoethnographic biography can be found at Appendix G, short and at the end as although I recognise I cannot escape my own embedded position in the research process my original aim was to research liminality of others and their stories remain my focus.

## **Scope**

This research seeks to explore how military personnel construct identity during a period of liminality brought about by their exit from the military. Narrative

analysis (NA) is used to study how participants invoke sense-making during the telling of their personal stories of the liminal. This will be supplemented with autoethnography and reflexivity. The research will take a socially constructed interpretivist perspective of narratives in relation to identity to provide rich description. This will enable the norms associated with military identity to be illuminated and how individuals position themselves in relation to those norms during liminality. This will enable insight into the tensions surrounding identity constructs during the liminal experience and how identities are shaped during transition to civilian life. The research involved interviews with 7 RAF Officers who have either voluntarily left, come to the end of their commission or have recently retired. Participants are a mixture of male and female from several different occupational specializations known as 'Branches'.

### **Limitations**

Members of the Army and the RN are excluded from this research, the focus is the RAF due to the gap in existing literature and the potential for access using existing contacts. Potential participants having served less than 10 years are excluded to insure participants have spent a significant amount of time exposed to the RAF as a TI.

### **Conclusions**

Conclusions at this stage are unknown as this is an exploratory study, however it is hoped that some development of theory relating to TIs, identity,

gender and how they affect liminality will emerge. It is suspected, for example, that Goffman's concept of the RAF as a TI is somewhat outdated in respect of the totality of military life (for example many service personnel now live in private housing) but is still applicable enough to have a profound effect on individuals during, and after their service. The masculine nature of the organization is also expected to influence both male and female participants in respect of their identity and how it may or may not 'fit' with civilian life. These concepts coupled with an establishment which supports egalitarian ideals (equal pay), yet is overtly paternalistic (provision of medical/dental care and housing), presents a dynamic organizational picture. Despite, the military's conservative nature (Kurth, 2010) adjustment to issues such as equal rights in theory and practice, demonstrated by the expansion of women's roles in the military, (Ross, 2015, Segal, 1995) is forcing change. Overall it is expected that there will be varying responses to the liminal experience expressed through narrative sense-making.

### **Anticipated Issues**

Despite having contacts who are still serving, it was recognised that access could be an issue if individuals were reluctant to participate or if personal circumstances changed; for example if participants decided to remain in the RAF. It was hoped that a sufficient number of contacts were known to replace any that should become unavailable.

Issues such as developing trust, listening rather than projecting one's own experiences and ensuring the interview stay on track were skills which were

practiced (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008, Sapsford, 2011). Other issues would be dealt with as a result of a professional and friendly approach coupled with a pilot interview.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Total Institutions**

Goffman defines the central characteristics of a TI as a place where the practices and norms of usual society are suspended; instead of people sleeping, playing and working in different places, all activities occur in one location. Furthermore, these activities transpire alongside the same people, under one authority against a strict schedule, and are all designed to support the organization's ultimate aim (Goffman, 1961). In the Introduction to *Asylums* (1961) Goffman divides institutions into five main types focusing on mental hospitals as his main area of research, and classifying Army Barracks separately. Goffman avoids criticisms to his selection of institutions by acknowledging that they are not exhaustive, and that none share all the characteristics used to define a TI such as conflation of work and home life; bureaucratic management of large groups, hostile stereotypes, surveillance, a split between inmates and staff, and restricted mobility and communication. By levelling this caveat he is able to generalize stating that these common characteristics are enough to anchor the concept.

*Asylums* was written between 1957 – 1961, with many of the military references predating 1940. Arguably it would be remiss to automatically assume their relevance and applicability to the modern military. Goffman's military



references rely heavily on T E Lawrence's "The Mint" a personal account of Lawrence's experiences as an enlisted man during the 1920s and 1930s. Lawrence wrote The Mint after a successful career in the Army where he held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (Lawrence of Arabia, 1926 p. 1). By joining the RAF as an enlisted man it is argued that his experiences as a serviceman would not be the same as his enlisted colleagues, that is not to say they would have found the experience better, merely that it would have been different.

Parallels can be made between enlisted personnel/officers and Goffman's inmates/staff representing another characteristic of a TI where "Social mobility between the two strata is grossly restricted" (Goffman, 1961, p. 19). Social restrictions persist in the contemporary military with buildings 'out of bounds' to personnel based on rank. However, a significant proportion of the officer core is now drawn from the junior ranks, and there are many examples of intermarriages. The implications of this is that some of the barriers, such as negative stereotypes, between the two worlds may be broken down. Additionally increasing numbers of military personnel live in private accommodation, for reasons of personal choice or lack of military housing. Despite *some* of the criteria used to classify the military as a TI being no longer applicable, others remain. For example the distinction between enlisted and officer accommodation with married officers entitled to larger homes regardless of family size, a reflection of status and hierarchy. Hostile stereotypes also persist with officers regarded negatively by troops (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) but both groups share standardized experiences of a TI such as a conflation of work/home life (Herman and Yarwood,

2014), bureaucratic management and surveillance (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009, Woodward and Jenkins, 2011).

Despite Goffman offering few insights into how individuals transitioned between the inside and outside a TI, he explicitly recognizes the effects they can have on the self; “they are the forcing houses for changing persons; each a natural experiment on what can be done to the self” (Goffman, 1961, p. 22). As such *Asylums* remains relevant to understanding the effects a TI on identity. Research on TIs, such as Martí and Fernández’s, (2013) paper on the Holocaust and Kenny’s (2016) paper on Ireland’s industrial schools, takes a historical perspective stressing the dominance of power through authority and legitimization invariably to the detriment of the ‘inmates’. In contrast Scott’s (2011) work on voluntary membership of TIs attempt to emphasize their positive nature in respect of reinventing identities. Other contemporary accounts, such as Tracy’s research on cruise ships still prescribe “a dominant discourse that essentially blankets dialogue and suffocates conflict” attempting to constantly control all aspects of members lives (Tracy, 2000, p. 120). In the military it is argued that this is experienced by all personnel; acting as “prisoner and guard a network of mutually reinforcing surveillance and control” (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009 p. 368). Additionally RAF personnel are subject to military law<sup>4</sup> adding another control dimension. Brown and Coupland’s (2015) work on elite professionals can help understand how the lives of service personnel are structured through self-discipline and commitment as individual needs are set aside for organizational

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<sup>4</sup> Queens Regulations (Royal Air Force, 2016).

goals. With, the long term effects a TI recognized in the literature "I've not been me. I have been who they want me to be." (Walker, 2012, p. 297) the self-discipline required to achieve this level of identity regulation over a sustained period entails a significant amount of commitment (Brown and Coupland, 2015) perhaps making liminality for military personnel even more pronounced.

The effects on the self, through membership of a TI, remain influential to an individual's self and social-identity both during, and long after service (Higate, 2001). Recent research into prison systems has highlighted the resilient nature of institutional identification, the need for reflexivity in transition and the importance of available alternative identities (Toubiana, 2014). How does a TI effect identities of ex-military personnel once formal membership no longer exists?

## **Identity**

Identity can be regarded as "the meanings attached to the self" (Gecas, 1982, p. 10). These meanings enable individuals to answer the question "'Who am I?' and – by implication 'how should I act?'" (Alvesson et al, 2008, p. 6). However, identity transcends the individual through social identity or organizational membership; "Who am I? And who do I want to be in the future?" (Brown and Coupland, 2015, p. 1316). Individuals sense of self is contingent on identifying themselves with and through others and social identity is reliant on acceptance from others. As such group identity secures value and meaning for the individual through identification with others (Alvesson et al, 2008, Ybema et al, 2012, Corlett and Mavin, 2014), while social identity is influenced by social

discourse and negotiations between the self and other(s) (McInnes and Corlett, 2012). These concepts are not always harmonious or accepted; the self can be affirmed, rejected or re-adjusted (Corlett and Mavin, 2014) resulting in an identity which is rarely stable (Brown and Coupland, 2015). Identities can therefore be regarded as fluid, dynamic and oscillating (Alvesson, et al, 2008, Ybema, et al, 2012).

In this respect identities can never be secured but are continuously enacted in order to be sustained (Brown and Coupland, 2015). They are recognized as being multiple and shifting (Alvesson et al, 2008, Brown and Coupland, 2015), coexisting (Corlett and Mavin, 2014) and are often under tension; for example the expectation to play a role of happy employee after receiving bad news (Tracy, 2000). Tensions can also exist between an aspirational group identity and the reality of everyday where the needs of the organization dominate the individual (Brown and Coupland, 2015). This is illustrated in Mallett and Wapshott's (2012) study of knowledge workers, where freedom of design was curtailed. Identities can be challenged (McInnes and Corlett, 2012), threatened (Alvesson et al, 2008,) resisted (Clarke and Knights, 2015), and regulated whether through the self, by peers, customers or by the organization (Tracy, 2000, Brown and Coupland, 2015) and they can be residual, left over from a previous experience or role (Herman and Yarwood, 2014). These concepts assist understanding of identity fluidity both constrained and constructed as a result of social and organizational influences.

The complexity outlined is not exhaustive but demonstrates the heterogeneity of identity, causing an almost continual engagement in identity work; how individuals create, sustain, challenge and adapt individual and social identity (McInnes and Corlett, 2012). For the purposes of this research the constructionist perspective describing identities as being continuously adapted and created through narrative storytelling will be followed (Brown and Coupland, 2015, Alvesson, et al, 2008). The identity narrative has illuminated professions such as rugby players (Brown and Coupland, 2015), knowledge workers (Mallett and Wapshott, 2012) and NGO staff (Ybema et al, 2012) from perspectives such as gender (Corlett and Mavin, 2014), power (McInnes and Corlett, 2012) and institutions (Tracy, 2000). Tracy's work is powerful because of its autographic nature, she is not an outsider but a member of the crew able to provide an insiders perspective to the organization. This is unlike Brown and Coupland (2015), who although accepted into the organization and able to access the 'lived reality' of the rugby players never subjected themselves to the lived experience, as such they remained outsiders, divorced from their subject.

Identity research of this type helps understand behaviour which links to organizational effectiveness through weak or strong performance, deliberate inaction and ultimately the decision to remain loyal or to leave an organization (Mallett and Wapshott, 2012, Alvesson et al, 2008, McInnes and Corlett, 2012).

Identity and its relation to power and gender is infused throughout the literature (Davey, 2008, McInnes and Corlett, 2012). Dick and Cassell's utilized critical discourse analysis to study the functions of discourse used by female

police officers in relation to individual identity and “ideological systems of belief that are dominant in any given society” (2004, p. 58). Despite emphasizing their role as participants and equals in the research it is argued that Dick and Cassell’s utilization of the power relationship between participants and researcher played a dominant role in their interviews and analysis. Their aim to problematize the relationship between the interpersonal and the ideological results in a subjective analysis, which while acknowledged, leaves alternatives unvoiced. In contrast it is suggested that the power relationship between the researched and researcher in Walker, K’s 2012 study into female marines in the US military was reversed with uncritical acceptance of participants responses resulting in conflated analysis which missed contradictions and opportunities to push the research boundaries of female identity in masculinized TIs. For example that being a good leader should be “recognized before being a good *woman* leader” but that “femininity can be an advantage ..... and that a female officer (leader) should act like a woman and not a man” (Walker, K, p. 28, 2012). Both studies expand understanding of women adopting masculine practices but while Dick and Cassells’ emphasis on reflexivity drowns their participants’ voices Walker’s uncritical acceptance fails to acknowledge a dominant institutionalized discourse. UK research has been undertaken into military identity (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009, Woodward & Jenkins, 2011), gender (Woodward and Winter, 2004) and the transition from military to civilian life (Higate, 2001, Herman and Yarwood, 2014). All have contributed to better understanding but none combine research into the effects of liminality on identity during transition from a TI using gendered norms.

## **Gender in the Military**

The RAF, like the other Armed Services, maintains a pay scale based on rank. As publically available information these pay scales serve as evidence to support the egalitarian nature of the services. However, if Kanter's (1977) ascertain that the tipping point for determining women's success requires 20% of the organization to be female then all 3 services fail. That is not to say 20% should be a target which once reached counts as successful gender intergration. However, a brief look at the history of the services shows the RAF has long been progressive in terms of integrating male and female personnel. From 1949 80% of the trades have been open to women and since 1970 men and women have undergone their initial training together (RAF Museum). Conversely the Army's training system remains segregated on the male/female binary. Nevertheless the first operational female RAF pilots did not graduate until 1990 and female operational squadron commanders are still unusual enough to warrant national press coverage indicating there is still much to achieve in respect of equality (Ward, 2015). Alvesson and Billing (1992) suggest gender symbolism, represented as typical male/female dualism and gender types can help in understanding the consequences of unconscious stereotyping in organisations, however it is also recognised behaviours cross the binary threshold.

Gender in the military, whether at the extremes as in Brown and Coupland's (2015) hyper-masculinity, focused and un-reflexive, or for women, who have learned to do "gender well and differently" (Mavin and Grandy, p. 234-

5, 2013), may result in different experiences of liminality. This could result in a readjustment of behaviour to more acceptable gendered norms especially for women who claim they have maintained their femininity by not becoming “one of the boys” (Walker, K. p. 28, 2012) but nevertheless have operated in a masculine environment. The effects of a masculinized TI, whether acknowledged or unrecognized offer a fertile environment for the dualisms and fluidity of gender binaries to be explored (Linstead and Brewis, 2004). For men experiencing transition, their perceived masculinity, strength and bravery (Woodward and Winter, 2004) might convey a continuation of status, or at the other end of the scale the adjustment may prove more challenging resulting in difficulties like homelessness (Johnsen et al, 2008). As such complications in adjusting to civilian life may well stem from Goffman's assertion that those leaving an institution, struggle to maintain their social status (1968). Or may simply be a lack of practical experience in dealing with the civilian world.

## **Liminality**

Liminality in relation to identity can be described as being when “a person is in between two identity constructions: when they are neither one thing nor the other” (Beech, 2011 p. 286). Liminality represents a period of ‘betwixt and between’; with its roots in anthropology it signifies a period during which the cessation of one aspect of identity occurs before another is adopted and accepted. Multiple identities can exist alongside each other evolving in response to changing circumstances. The process of transition may result in tensions as one aspect of



identity becomes more dominant than another as liminality is experienced. Identities, pre, during and post liminality therefore become conflated as they are enacted and accepted or rejected by others. The liminal experience, although temporal, has no explicit time frame and different people will experience it in different ways, indeed Daskalaki et al, (2015) suggest some may never leave it. Beech (2010, p. 286) recognizes liminality in relation to identity as it “occurs [at] the intersection of structure and agency [and is] well fitted to expand understanding of self and social identity”.

Liminality can result from a significant disturbance to ones notion of self; and work-related identity loss has been associated with liminality because ones sense of self is often contingent upon occupation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). Theoretical research has emphasised an important link between work and identity (Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly, 2013). As such a work related identity loss that is viewed negatively, as opposed to positively, effects how liminality is experienced. However, regardless of how identity loss is viewed individuals “certainly find their world turned upside down and those props that sustained their selfhood severely weakened” (Gabriel et al (2010, p.1706).

While socially accepted identities are recognized as necessary to construct ‘successful’ identities (Corlett and Mavin, 2014), acceptance is not always granted resulting in dynamic, multiple, coexisting and conflictual identities (Alvesson et al, 2008).

Walker’s (2012) research on soldiers anticipating leaving the Army revealed a sense of status loss as a recurring theme and individuals using a self-

aggrandizing discursive strategy, through the projection of “soldierly superiority”, and “Being ‘a cut above’ (p. 292), civilians. Walker also finds the aspirational civilian selves imagined by leavers “often naive and unhelpful” (p.299) yet notes the leaver does not expect an uncomplicated transition, unfortunately these views are not developed. He goes on to state the resettlement process is unsupportive, denying anticipatory loss. If resettlement has become part of the leaving ritual to the extent it inhibits individual ability to transition it has become part of the institutional script limiting individual capacity to de-identify with the institution Toubiana (2014). Walker’s research fails to consider gender in relation to the liminal concluding pessimistically suggesting preparatory narratives are wasted. Although some practical ideas on how to improve the leaving process are provided, e.g. work placements, he offers no prospective avenues for future research. Despite this Walker provides a valuable and rare postpositivist insight into military identities.

Research on liminality reflects the complexity of identity research with aspects of ambiguous, contested and temporary identities featuring prominently. Liminality while not difficult to conceptualize, may, by definition be temporary for most, but for others it could be a permanent state (Daskalaki et al, 2015). While the beginning of this period may be obvious, as Ann Widdecombe recalled “The hour I ceased to be an MP, I ceased to be an MP”, (Byrne and Theakston, 2015, p. 2) what comes next may be more multifaceted. Crucially reflexivity is not always recognized or a guaranteed part of the process (Gabriel et al, 2010).

Beech (2011) recognized his research lacked opportunity to provide evidence of the ritualistic nature of liminality, although he acknowledged its importance, this omission is repeated but not acknowledged in Herman and Yearwood's (2014) and Walker's (2012) research.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods of data collection**

It is recognized that ethnographic research acknowledges the subtleties of human behaviour, enabling a deeper understanding by recognizing behaviour as constantly evolving in response to different interpretations of situations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). For these reasons an empirical interpretivist approach from a socially constructionist perspective has been followed through NA of semi-structured interviews (Crotty, 1998). This involves the analysis of data where there is a description of events involving individuals, they are usually temporal in nature and involve sense-making through contextualizing events and understanding the actions of the actors within them. NA will enable insights into the organisational life of the RAF and the identity work undertaken by individuals during a period of liminality which would not have been possible using more positivist means. (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008, p. 183).

NA was chosen because narratives enable people to engage in identity work creating stories which can be used to project their sense of self as a tool of transformation or preservation (Watson and Watson, 2012). However, there is a risk associated with NA, narrative imperialism; the danger of oversimplification, generalisation and that the narrative is all important. These concerns can be countered by an awareness of the diachronic or episodic nature of narratives and the concept of multiple interpretations of storylines (Phelan, 2005). To address this and offer another perspective autoethnography (via embedded text boxes)

will be used to clearly and unashamedly add my own voice to the story . The aim is to provide critical assessment of the narratives, as a result of being in possession of “privileged insider status” (Bell, 1999, p. 22). Autoethnography is defined as a combination of autobiography (self-narrative) and ethnography (the study of culture) which allows the researcher to use personal experience to understand a cultural setting (Ellis et al, 2011). This combination of methods was assembled in a response to the inductive nature of the research with NA seemingly particularly suitable to demonstrate the lived experience and identity work verbalized through sense-making. As with Watson and Watson, (2012), and their study of identity work in pubs it was felt the RAF is an organisation where stories are told to maintain social order and storytelling is a key activity.

The methodology is qualitative and exploratory using semi-structured interviews to enable conversations to flow readily. This is seen as a more natural approach than structured interviews (Blaxter et al, 2010, Walliman, 2005) which were discounted as it was felt they were too inflexible. Discursive analysis was originally considered to assess how military personnel conceptualize identity as they experience liminality. However during the analysis stage, as a result of further research into qualitative techniques, NA for reasons already stated seemed to be a more appropriate method. Questionnaires were considered due to their potential reach but it was felt from the outset that these would not

*In examining my own motives gratitude that they agreed to take part also played a role and if I felt they needed to talk about something that was not directly related to my research I let them, enabling them to speak and me to build rapport.*

provide the rich picture of military life and identity work that was sought. The theoretical perspective taken thus enabled a deeper understanding of the topic than a quantitative approach which not only did not reflect the researchers own perspective but would force categorization of extremely complex and individual experiences. Finally, it is hoped this research will extend into a longitudinal study as the researcher continues researching and studying towards a PhD.

The status of the researcher and participant is recognised in respect of one participant having power over the other, (Walliman, 2005, Blaxter et al, 2010). Here the researcher and participant share a professional background, with a common understanding of the organization in regards to culture and language, as such a peer to peer relationship is shared (Quinney et al, 2016). However, these relationships are not homogenous, complexity is added in respect of the rank relationship, background and experiences of researcher and participant. The participants although all personally acquainted with the researcher can be seen on a scale of familiarity socially and professionally, making the power dynamics of each interview different. These relationships coupled with the latitude given to the participants resulted in fluctuations of power throughout the interviews (Hoffman, 2007). It is therefore acknowledged there is a symbiotic relationship between the researcher and the researched and the 'insider status' was recognized repeatedly by the participants by referencing shared past experiences and associations.

In total 7 interviews were conducted with volunteers who are in the process of leaving the RAF or have left within the last 12 months. Participants were

identified through non-probability sampling; exclusively personal contacts (Blaxter et al, 2010). Where possible the interviews were conducted face to face, in the hope the participants would be free to converse openly (Quinney et al, 2016). A copy of the questions asked, a brief background to the interview setting and anonymized participant information can be found at Appendixes A and B. A timeline of the participants in the leaving cycle (their position on a leaving timeline) can be found at Appendix C.

Emphasis on particular words or other back ground information (laughter/crying) were detailed as required. When used italics indicate the participant's stress on a certain word while capital letters indicate shouting. All emphasis on any such wording is the participant's.

Analysis of the empirical data was iterative and involved a combination of stages; familiarization, reflection, conceptualization and categorisation to explore how military personnel use narrative to explore their experiences (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008, Rowley, 2012). While co-construction is acknowledged as inevitable (Bell, 1999), care was taken not to lead the participants.

## **Ethics**

Ethical issues arise at all points in the research process and an ethical position was adopted from conception. This position strove to maintain the privacy and anonymity of all participants throughout data collection, analysis and dissemination of the research. This was an issue as some but not all of the participants are known to each other and with few women serving in certain

specializations revealing details of rank could threaten anonymity. All names were anonymized in line with OU policy. Throughout the analysis stage of the research efforts were made to ensure a fair and honest representation of the participants' views were maintained and no issues of confidentiality arose, if they had the wishes of the participants would have been respected (Blaxter et al, 2010). No position was taken to how or if the participants communicated their involvement in the research with each other. To do so would have been unreasonable, hindering the informal and open nature of the research and restricting the possible identification of new candidates for further studies through snowballing (Blaxter et al, 2010). It is also hoped as the research develops, participants will share their experiences with each other through an on-line forum where privacy, through restricted access, if not anonymity can be assured. This would be achieved by harnessing social media, possibly Facebook, where participants can share advice and ideas on a voluntary basis, (although it is recognised not all participants may use Facebook). Another possibility is to create a website, or find an existing website, such as Airspace<sup>5</sup>, where a discussion forum could be hosted. This would extend the empirical evidence which could be used in further research but would require negotiation of access, administration and the development of a separate ethics policy.

The Open University's Code of Practice for Research (2013) along with its Ethics Principles for Research involving Human Participants (2014) will be followed to ensure the rights of research participants are respected and the

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<sup>5</sup> A community site serving Royal Air Force personnel, Reservists and their families.



results of the research are credible. Consent forms and information leaflets have been provided to all participants, examples can be found at Appendix D and E.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Collecting and analysing the data**

#### **Collecting**

All participants received a leaflet providing background information to the research and a consent form either electronically or in person. Those receiving the electronic copies signed and returned the copies electronically. Initially contact was made with 5 potential participants and 4 interviews were conducted without issue, after some missed appointments the fifth participant was successfully interviewed. Due to concerns around availability contact was made with 2 further candidates, both were interviewed making the total number of participants 7. However, apart from one key quote, which will be clearly indicated, the 7<sup>th</sup> interview is not included in this research due to the limited time available for transcription leaving 6 interviews available for analysis.

Although attempts were made to choose participants who were at a similar stage in the leaving process their experiences span an approximate 2 year period in the leaving cycle. Due to the dispersed location of the participants and restrictions on the researcher's geographic reach 3 of the interviews were conducted via Skype video and 3 were conducted face to face. Two were interviewed in the participant's homes and one in an Officer Mess<sup>6</sup> (OM) Ante

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<sup>6</sup> The Officers Mess is where the single and unaccompanied married personnel live.

Room. This interview was the most inhibited as neither the participant nor researcher relaxed fully due to the formal nature of the surroundings.

Conducting the interviews via Skype while not ideal did not overly reduce the interview effectiveness, this is believed to be in large part due to the familiarity of researcher and participants. All interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The use of Skype meant participants who would not have been accessible for face to face interviews due to geographic distance became available. Furthermore the alternative, a telephone interview, would have lacked the personal nature and visual cues of a face to face interview provided by Skype. As the participants were known many of the potential pitfalls such as building rapport and trust, potentially more difficult to achieve when the interviews are not in person, were not an issue. All the participants were technically competent enough and the connection was strong enough to ensure the interviews were successful. Travel time and costs were also mitigated through the use of Skype adding to its appeal as an interview medium. Finally, from an ethical perspective a duty of care issue did arise when one of the participants became upset when discussing her decision to leave the RAF. During the interview itself this was dealt with compassion and humour and a follow up message expressing concern and thanks was sent to the participant the following day. A return message was received which alleviated any concerns (Hanna, 2012, Deakin and Wakefield, 2013).

Although key questions were identified prior to undertaking the interviews and all participants were asked the same questions, the informal nature of the

interviews meant participants' responses revealed other interesting areas which were, time allowing, pursued through an individual line of questioning (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008).

During the data gathering stage it became apparent associating individuals with certain factors such as rank, specialization, specific jobs, and length of service or gender could threaten their anonymity. As such it was decided to generalize these specifics through a system of coding (Blaxter et al, 2010) while ensuring masking the specifics did not detract from the interpretation, analysis or findings (Appendix F).

## **Analysis**

Analysis of the data was inductive and iterative, the initial interviews were transcribed by hand resulting in a number of themes quickly presenting themselves. A system of categorisation was developed following a socially constructed perspective. The aim was to use a system explicitly linked the data, the analysis and the interpretation making the analysis grounded in nature (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008) in terms of context and time, in this case looking at careers spanning between 18 - 30 years. (From a gendered perspective this was important as over that time women's legal right to stay in the RAF after child birth changed). Categorisation was challenging due to the diversity and volume of material. Underlying themes were drawn out to emphasise the original aims of the research project in respect of liminality, identity, gender and effects of a TI broadly covering; military life, family, uniform, playing the game, leaving and future.

Emergent themes outside the original research scope have been noted for future research.

It was also essential from the researcher's ethical perspective to be faithful to the views of the respondents, whether shared or not. Differences of opinion also reflect the individuality found even within the constraints of a total institution. The analysis was therefore inductive in nature, reflected

*The aim was to make every effort not to be selective in the analysis and presentation of the evidence but to provide critical analysis and challenge myself as a researcher.*

in the semi-structured interview and the latitude given to the participants during the interview who explored tangents as part of their own sense-making, until time became an issue, when they were drawn back through a follow up or interview question.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Interpreting the Data**

Once collected and categorised interpretation took place through NA as described in Easterby-Smith et al, (2007). It was decided to present the research from the beginning, in order to understand their liminal experience it is vital to contextualise their military experience, from why they joined to why they decided to leave.

### **Family links and adventure**

The reasons for joining varied but two main themes emerge from the narratives; family links and adventure.

“to see the world and do interesting and unusual things.” (Lisa)

“.. it actually stemmed from my Grandfather, he was in the Air Force and he always said it was a great career ..... Just looking to do something a bit different a bit adventurous” (Patrick)

“I think it was probably what I was always going to do, my dad was in the Air Force, ... I don't really remember a time when I wasn't going to do it.” (Paul)

“... it felt really exciting. My dad was in the Air Force and to me it was Ohh let’s go... I went into the careers office with a picture of a crewman on the back of a chinook ... and went “I want to do that, that’s me.” (Claire)

“I guess it was for the flying actually... Loved flying, loved everything about flying.”  
(Jennifer)

“I was 11 and my mother said what do you want to be? ... she said do you think you might join the RAF like your Daddy ... I have blamed her to this day I said you have brainwashed me from the age of 11, ... and I don’t know why but it hit something inside and from the age of 11 that is all I ever wanted to do.” (Maria)

*My grandparents met in the RAF during WWII and their stories were part of my childhood. When I joined up, over 50 years later, my nana gave me her shoe polish brushes which still had her service number visibly written on their wooden handles.*

Literature on generational tendencies in regards to occupational inheritance stresses the importance of human capital, the transfer of tangible (practical skills) or intangible (knowledge, goodwill, loyalty) from one generation to the next, often as a by-product of the home environment. On-the-job training received informally as a result of a conflated home/work life influences the next generations’ choice of occupation (Laband and Lentz, 1983). As positivists’ Laband and Lentz’s research lacks an emotional context although it recognizes intangibles such as goodwill and loyalty. In a TI where home and work are blurred or non-existent the propensity demonstrated here for familial connections is

unsurprising. What are the consequences of this generational emotional attachment when an individual leaves the military?

### Uniform

One of the most visual symbols of military life is the uniform. Goffman (1961) defines one of the characteristics of a TI as the replacement of personal

*I did have one Station Commander who had his shirts tailored, he also drove an expensive sports car. He was fairly popular, although also regarded as a bit showy, but this was only to be expected from a fast jet pilot who are known for their arrogance and confidence.*

possessions with an issued substitute. The manner in which this is done and the quality of the replacements ensures the individual experiences what Goffman regards a personal defacement. Within the RAF the aim of the uniform is as much a step towards a refocusing of identity to a military professional, as opposed to what Goffman describes as a loss of identity. However, it symbolises homogeneity, erasing differences, bringing about cohesion through group identity albeit a constrained one as rank is clearly denoted, ensuring everyone knows their place.

The quotes below demonstrate how the concept of uniform is used as a narrative tool to take pride in or reject the RAF. For Paul wearing his uniform in public when he received his Master's degree was a highlight of his military career. The combination of wearing a squadron leaders uniform with his graduation gown embodying for him success and credibility.



“Getting the Masters at University, the best day ever. Being there in uniform with the gown on because I never thought, I left school with 2 O’Levels.” (Paul)

For Maria, the uniform for her at the moment of pressing the button<sup>7</sup> represented belonging, inclusion reflected in a need to find someone in a uniform of any colour (Navy/dark blue, Army/green and RAF/light blue) to share the intense feelings she was experiencing.

“And there was no blue suiters in the office that day at all, in fact there was no uniformed people in the office that day at all. So I had to do it, so I pressed the button and then I felt sick I felt really ill, went to the loo had a few tears and then I went looking for the Air Commodore, I don’t know if you know him? ... I just went looking for anybody in a blue suit to say I’ve PvR’d.” (Maria)

For two of the participants the uniform enabled them to avoid the double bind described by (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001) of being either too masculine and denying their femininity, or too feminine and therefore unprofessional. This places women who want to present an image of professional femininity in a catch 22 situation where they are dammed if they do and dammed if they don’t.

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<sup>7</sup> To leave the RAF involves logging onto the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) tool and pressing 7 buttons. Known as ‘7 buttons to freedom’ or more traditionally as ‘putting your papers in’.

"I wear a uniform, I don't have to think about what I have to wear, I don't have to think about anything other than putting my hair back in a bun and sticking a uniform on."

(Lisa)

"I love the fact that I didn't have to think about what to put on in the morning. Just uniform. Easy, I didn't have to think about anything." (Jennifer)

*We had a visit from the Italian Air Force, the women wore knee high heeled black boots as part of their uniform. Our blokes didn't know where to look and we women didn't quite know what to think, after all they were in their own uniform and the general consensus was they looked a lot better than us! The Italian officers looked equally confused not quite sure what to make of our reaction. Were they there as eye candy? Even as I was thinking it I knew I was wrong, a classic example of displaced normative values?*

The uniform enabled Lisa and Jennifer to bypass the 'double bind' providing an element of freedom allowing them to be judged on performance not appearance. While the removal of thought could reinforce reliance and dependence in this example it could also result in liberation.

*Any woman who has stood paralyzed with indecision in front of a wardrobe full of clothes trying to decide what to wear for work will understand the perhaps contradictory liberating effect of being able to wear a uniform. My statement above demonstrates how stereotypes can be reproduced 'eye candy' and resisted 'I knew I was wrong' but this was for me a conscious effort and I would suggest takes a certain amount of personal reflexivity regarding motives which is not necessarily encouraged within a total institution.*

For Jennifer uniform is used to reflect her disaffection with the RAF having being excluded from the promotion board 2 years running because of the same administrative issue, the uniform becomes a symbol of rebellion and conflict between work and family.

“I think I’ve got every grounds to say, “Look, if you think I’m coming back after the way you have treated me and if you think I am putting my uniform on for one day you have got another thing coming.”

“but I don’t think I can put on uniform anymore. I don’t think I can drop my kids off at nursery at 8 in the morning and still be late for work and then pick them up at 6 at night and still have left early and feel guilty that I’m not doing my bit for the AF.” (Jennifer)

Here Jennifer is struggling to make sense of work and motherhood within the confines of the RAF and imagines herself coping with the nursery run and work, doubting her ability to do it.

The idea of being under constant surveillance, another of Goffman’s characteristics of a TI, maybe so ingrained, the colonization of the self so complete resulting in self-disciplining behaviour so natural the participants are unaware of its existence. This quote from Patrick is revealing not just in terms of what but how he said it. It seems to represent his disassociation and readiness to move on, but that this admission had to be whispered signifies he wasn’t necessarily comfortable with this act of rebellion.

“I am a bit fed up with the uniform (I don’t know why I am whispering) we are being recorded aren’t we. I think I am done with the uniform a little bit... [Later] Being in the military and not wanting to wear uniform maybe I am not cut out to be in the military. ” (Patrick)

### **Playing the Game**

Playing the game in order to achieve promotion or success is not a concept unique to the military but for women operating in a masculine environment research has shown they perceive the game as a masculine endeavour (Davey, 2008). Within the military there is a recognition that there is a game to be played but there are differences in how this is perceived not just internally between the sexes but also how military females’ perceptions differ from civilian counterparts.

The male participants do not refer to the ‘game’ explicitly but rather discuss promotion and success matter-of-factly, they acknowledge the game whilst engaging in resistance.

“it was wanting the recognition [promotion] for my own ego but not being prepared to give up the jobs I wanted to do. So taking the overseas job when actually everyone said you shouldn’t be taking it you should be doing a 2ic<sup>8</sup> job. So you will set yourself back a couple of years. It was reconciling myself knowing that I don’t want to get promoted I want to do these jobs, deep down you know what x,

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<sup>8</sup> Second in command, a pre-requisite tour for promotion to the next rank the sections deputy.

y and z have got promoted now it's time that I did as well. And I am better than him or I am better than her." (Patrick)

"I had taken myself out of the promotion running ... I thought I'd rather do my masters then go back onto ICSC<sup>9</sup> and go on to my Wing Commander" (Paul)

Patrick and Paul are aware there is a game that needs to be played; certain jobs and courses need to be done in order to be promoted but both actively resist conforming choosing instead to follow their own path. Until for Patrick at least seeing his peers get promoted spurred him to conform. Contrastingly the female participants are explicit about 'the game'; the contested and resisted nature of their own engagement; their perception of others who do play and recognition of their own need to do so in order to be promoted.

"there was a game to be played and I didn't want to play it. I thought I'd get what I wanted without playing that game [promoted]. And I didn't. ... I think I learned a little bit too late that I need to be playing the game so that by the time I started playing the game I was a couple of years behind my peers" (Claire)

"I've never had a game plan I've never wanted to get to a certain rank ... and I had my junior officers there sitting me down and telling me what they expected for their assessment ..., they knew their game plan and I was in awe, I was also in shock and I was bloody hacked off with them at the same time. But I couldn't

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<sup>9</sup> ICSC Intermediate Command and Staff course (8 week residential course compulsory on promotion to Squadron Leader).

help respect the fact that they were 10yrs younger than me and they knew exactly where they wanted to get to. (Maria)

But what is different here compared to Davey's (2008), research is although 'the game' and its consequences are acknowledged and evaluations are made "I was bloody hacked off" there are no judgements made within the narratives of the game being "unnatural" for women (p. 663) just an awareness that individuals (male or female) who play the game get promoted.

### **Military Life**

Military life can be all encompassing which, in part is explained by the unique nature of the military where personnel can be engaged in 'life-and-death situations', its legitimate ability to use force and the military's status as a TI (Higate and Cameron, 2006). It therefore demands a high level of commitment in and out of work.

"the Air Force was very much a massive part of my life. I couldn't just detach myself from it ... I had identified myself as a member of the Armed Forces" (Lisa)

"your life was never your own and even when you were not on duty or you were on leave you always had to have your mobile phone with you." (Lisa)

"I was going into my 2ic tour .... Well that is 2 years of hell, in as much as ... well it wasn't hell, I loved it. I dined out on that tour but it was 2 years of, you have my life that is it. (Claire)

Although Claire's statement is contradictory it is clear she relished the job enjoying the people and teamwork it afforded her, however, it came at a time in her life when she made a decision between family and career. "So I wanted promotion more than I did a baby at that time." Unfortunately for Claire the timing of her 'promotion tour' coincided with a reduction in the size of the military which had a corresponding effect on promotion prospects. She was left with no promotion and no baby. Her reaction was to no longer delay the family,

"right fuck it, I'll go and do some first tourist job<sup>10</sup> and then get pregnant ... and within two months got pregnant cause I thought I am not putting things off any longer. ... Cause the right moment will never come along if you are in the military ..."

Although Claire was subsequently promoted she had made her decision to leave.

"So I accepted it [promotion] with a view that I'll do three years for the pension thank you very much and then I will come out." (Claire).

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<sup>10</sup> A job allocated to officers straight out of training, an 'easy' job.

In this context, despite hurt 'pride' Claire bares no ill feeling towards the military but feels like she has taken ownership of her life by putting her own needs before the military.

"it's not that I feel they owed me anything, I have had a whale of a time ... but this is about me now, this is not about the Air Force, this is about me".

She takes action by accepting the promotion but still decides to leave. However the scheduling of her departure was determined by the military, to qualify for her pension at the next rank she had to complete 3 further years of service. As an example of poststructuralism, where "agency is perceived to be the simultaneous act of free will and submitting to the regulatory order" (Davey, 2008, p. 666) two inducements for retention, promotion and pension, are revealed as fundamental controlling factors of a TI.

The participants are not blind to the military as a greedy institution which "attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality ... they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty" (Coser, 1974, p. 4 in Roth, 1977) however they see this relationship as a trade. Once this balance is upset through the removal of one of its key motivators or the price becomes too high with regards effects on the family the balance shifts and often a decision to leave is made.

## **Family Life**

The nature of a TI inherently means decisions made in the professional sphere life cross into the personal; from where you live to when to start a family.



The expectation to put the job first are often an unspoken but nevertheless influential factor in members' private lives.

"I didn't want to pitch up and be 2ic and go on maternity leave, I mean that doesn't happen that would make me feel really bad, because I'd be like 'I'm off again' and letting the squadron down ..." (Claire)

Conflicts between the professional and personal are not exclusive to the military or women but the transcripts show issues of family, children and equality were distinctly more prevalent in the female narratives than the males reflecting the wider UK societal view that childcare is predominantly female responsibility.

"I would have taken the specialist course when it was first offered to me. I turned it down when I first got commissioned because I was married, I wanted a child, not a good career move [not taking the course] but I was naïve ... I didn't know what not doing the course would mean later on." (Maria)

Although Maria is discussing a decision she made nearly 20 years ago, Claire's more recent experience reveals that tensions between professional and personal remain an issue. Maria counters her disappointment in respect of her promotion success by focusing on what she has achieved professionally and personally.

“and doing that as a female [her OOA<sup>11</sup> tour in Afghanistan] and as a parent [a single parent] and having raised Lee at the same time to become the lovely young man he is, really I think I have done the package and I married a lovely man to boot who I met on OOA.” (Maria)

Whilst promotion to the next rank wasn't forthcoming she is able to reconstruct success through her professional accomplishments and her family life ensuring her identity is not restricted to the RAF, “I am a mummy, I've a nice home and a good family and I've got a good job” (Maria). Once family becomes a consideration previously appealing aspects of the job; travel, adventure, become negative. Again this issue is not just confined to women.

“I am expected to deploy I am expected to move and that is a great upheaval for my family.” (Lisa)

“I am coming up for 38 I don't want to move round every two years .. I have loved it, but I was using language “When we are 50 Carl we can do this that and the other ...” and you get this smacking realisation that life is going to pass us by, we will be like ships in the night.” (Claire)

“And I am fed up of always having to have one eye 18 months ahead, where am I going next? Right, do we think we need to move the kids? Right, the kids aren't

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<sup>11</sup> OOA out of area, operational tour outside of the UK.

in school yet you know, phone your mates is that job any good? Phone the desk, right I want that job I am right for it ...” (Patrick)

“leaving your family and also at the same time having a posting on you while you were away and having to sort a move out while you were still away and that just didn’t appeal to me in the slightest.” (Paul)

“there is no normality in our lives unless I stay static and I am not sure, am I moving the kiddies? I mean Sept is a really big deal isn’t it? If I am going to be making a decision to move jobs then I need to have got Lilly a place in a school, I don’t need to be moving house...and starting a new job” (Jennifer)

When you first join up moving is straightforward. Ten, fifteen years later with a family, partner, children, house there is added complexity and the emotional aspect of moving comes across in the narratives as an aspect of service life that is normalised.

*Over a period of 4 years we moved house 5 times, we had 3 different jobs each, I had a miscarriage, my husband’s father died, we had our 2 children and my husband deployed overseas when our firstborn was 6 weeks old. I was exhausted and I was often trying to do it all, job, house, kids, alone. I couldn’t face the thought of going through the stress of another move and another co-location battle. I had reached my 16 year point, my time was up, I decided to leave.*

Here Patrick discusses his accommodation choices during his time in the RAF.

“So may be by having that time living separately I may not be as institutionalised as some, I don’t know ... we always preferred not to live in a quarter. (Patrick)

Because? (Interviewer)

I don’t know perhaps we wanted that independence perhaps we didn’t want to be institutionalised.” (Patrick)

*Patrick was inhibited during the interview and as we left our conversation continued more freely. Patrick said he was thinking of taking a secondary duty and it was funny as he had not had a secondary duty since he had been promoted. I laughed and said perhaps it is because you have decided to leave it has become your choice as opposed to something you have to do. He groaned “I never thought of it like that, perhaps I am more institutionalised than I thought” (permission was sort to include this extract)*

Patrick’s decision not to live in quarters and not to take on a secondary duty<sup>12</sup> can be regarded as

signs of resistance against the normative expectations of the TI. His subsequent consideration to take on a secondary duty can be seen, along with his decision to leave the military, as way of demonstrating control over his own life.

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<sup>12</sup> Extra duties personnel are expected to take on over and above their day job which are used to demonstrate skills/capacity/leadership used in annual reports to boost promotion chances e.g. being member of a club.

## Policy Vs Practice

Despite efforts the MoD has made in regards to equality the policy (Equality and Diversity Scheme) is not necessarily translated into practice (Bultitude et al, 2012) evidenced as the female participants, both operating in male dominated specialisations, discuss promotion.

“I felt that unspoken and in fact it was sometimes spoken if I am really honest. My boss actually said “You know you would have been a Squadron Leader by now if it wasn’t for the fact you had had children”. Which he doesn’t have children and I think he felt he was being honest but it just cemented the fact that there is ... a view point that if you have the audacity to have children and go off on maternity leave then ..” (Lisa)

“when I met with the Station Commander and senior officers in manning<sup>13</sup> [male officers] who compared having a baby to having a hip replacement and who told me that I couldn’t expect, as anybody who took extended leave from the RAF, couldn’t expect to pick up where they left off in their career. So then, yeh, it became pretty easy to tell them to stick their job.” (Lisa)

“and the Wing Commander [male] said to me “Do you really feel that you can be competitive with your fellow Officers who have not, who have not chosen to take

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<sup>13</sup> A reference to personnel services, the RAF’s equivalent of HRM. The name was changed from ‘manning’ some years ago but remains in use and is a linguistic example of the masculine nature of the RAF.

a career break and do you feel, you have taken periods of maternity it was your choice to have a family, it was your choice to take a career break. And do you really feel that you can be competitive?”” (Jennifer)

As a greedy institution the RAF remains, in these cases, an unsupportive organisation for women who want to combine children and career. In this light it is unsurprising the women narrated resistance; “it became pretty easy to tell them to stick their job” (Lisa), “fuck it’ I am not interested” (Claire) “if you think I’m coming back after the way you have treated me ... you have got another thing coming.” (Jennifer).

## **Leaving**

Leaving the military is never a matter of if but when, like the police the military has an upper age limit, until recently 55. The specifics of this have now changed to reflect Government policy but are still lower than the national level. Leaving the military therefore should never be a surprise but nevertheless results in mixed feelings. The following quotes demonstrate the range of emotions experienced by individuals when confronted with leaving.

“a little bit apprehensive of what am I going to really miss” (Patrick)

“Horrific. ... I find it really difficult” (Maria)

“But I feel free for the first time in a long time completely shackled the shackles have come off and that the future is very much what I make it, whether that is good or bad, and I don’t have to curtail down to somebody else’s vision of what my life should be like.” (Lisa)

Lisa’s statement is Goffmanesque (1961) relating to the RAF as a prison, in which she feels has been ‘shackled’. But it is also hopeful if slightly unrealistic in not recognising society’s influences and expectations. Prison metaphors pervade many aspects of military life, with leaving equating to the release date associated with a prison term, “... handing my ID card in ... like a vision of taking the chains off”. (Walker, 2012, p. 298). The effects on identity was also noted by one of Walker’s (2012, p. 297) participants “I’ve not been me. I have been who they want me to be” and for Lisa the removal of the shackles represents freedom from institutional expectations. Yet there are indications she will find it difficult to release her military identity as she has accepted a reservist job and although she is having second thoughts, she feels ‘obligated’ to go ahead with it as her commitment is part of her “military ... ethos”. Here we are presented with evidence of tension and contradiction, the desire to be free coupled with the desire to remain in the RAF, ‘safe’. As such Lisa is existing in a contested liminal space. Freedom however celebrated can become a burden.

“Initially it was elation, yeh we have made the decision. It was the elation of this is great this is exactly what I’ve always said I’m going to do and we have done it. ... we can finally get the house where we want to. Grow up with the kids, the

family home instead of “how long are we going to be here? Do we need to rent this out? So? Do we need to go back into ...? ... It took a lot of the uncertainty away so it felt really good. Really good. (Patrick)

“we have had the unfortunate luxury of too much choice [where to live], we thought it was great to start with ... That has massively kept me awake at night” (Patrick)

From having decisions made for you, where you are going to live, what job you are going to do, to making those decisions yourself can be challenging and for individuals not well equipped to make those decisions. Those who find this difficult may explain incidents like homelessness in ex-service personnel. Or the clustering of ex-military personnel in certain parts of the country (Herman and Yarwood, 2014). That is not to say individuals were unaware of this lack of control, indeed Jennifer welcomed it;

“I think I'd have been a complete disaster actually in the civilian world, without the structure of the military, ... I didn't have to think about anything. I knew where I was working, I knew where I was living, and I didn't have to worry. I moved jobs, ... I would have never moved jobs in the civilian world if I had had to think about where, what job am I going to go to ... where am I going to live am I going to get on with anybody?” (Jennifer)



*For myself, while I enjoyed living in for its convenience (meals/cleaning) and friendships I also found it claustrophobic. On one posting I could see my office from my bedroom window (100 yards away), Mon-Fri I had no need to go anywhere but between these 2 buildings. I could not conceive of my world being that small and promptly moved out. More recently when viewing a house to buy the estate agent pointed out the proximity of the school, the swimming pool and the village hall. "You will never need to go anywhere else" she cheerily proclaimed I do not think I managed to hide the look of horror on my face. Needless to say we did not buy the house.*

Perhaps then the experience of liminality could be judged in part on how invested individuals are in the RAF, how much they identify with the organisation and how much they have let the organisation control their lives. For Lisa and Maria, at similar points in the leaving process the sensation of leaving was different, perhaps because Maria is living in her own home while for Lisa living in military accommodation the ties to the RAF remain.

"Because I still live in quarters and I still have a very much close interaction with the RAF, I don't feel that I am leaving yet ... I am in this lovely hiatus where I don't have to put up with any of the negative stuff but I am still going to family happy hours<sup>14</sup>, I am still going for coffees with colleagues, I am still using the station crèche I still feel very much part of the community." (Lisa)

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<sup>14</sup> Once a month Officers Mess' have a family Happy Hour.

Despite obtaining distance by being in her own home Maria still describes her current situation by drawing on a military metaphor; PODL<sup>15</sup>.

“... now I just feel like I am on leave [holiday]. ... it will be interesting to leave, how I adapt, it's just a bit like being on PODL I guess. At the moment I am enjoying the freedom, I am sort of, it's a bit weird, I am sort of in this cloud of not knowing. I am neither here nor there.” (Maria)

Being ‘betwixt and between’ being “neither one thing nor the other” (Beech, 2011) is for Maria a contested one, “Well the very fact that I can talk to you and get emotional again shows that I am not in a comfortable place” (Maria), however she is enjoying the ‘freedom’ and intellectually at least looking forward to the liminal process.

## **Future**

As the only participant who had not definitely decided to leave the interview became a way for Jennifer to try out new identity constructs (both military and civilian) in a safe environment. She repeatedly highlighted her success with Earthworks, a job she took up to prove to herself and the RAF that she could be successful; “I am number one for the global incentive ... and I have remained at the top of the leader board ...” while describing herself as a potentially “shit

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<sup>15</sup> Post Operational Detachment Leave (PODL) a 3-4 week leave period personnel are entitled to on return from an operational.

Wing Commander” one whose “troops would love [her]” but who wouldn’t impress her boss.

“I love the Air Force, I need a career break, I need to support my husband, I need to support my kiddies but only for a year – 18 months and then I want to be back in the Air Force.”

The desire to be there for her husband and children is essentially at war with her ‘love’ for the RAF, which needs to be balanced against the lack of promotion recognition and the potential ‘challenging’ jobs at the next rank. Throughout the interview Jennifer uses narrative to prepare herself for leaving and yet she is not ready to commit. When looking to her future employment Maria draws on its familiarity and uses humour (Hatch, 1997) to dilute any apprehension she may be feeling towards her new role;

“it is an easy step they are a civilian company but they are contracted with the MoD and I am going into a job that I very much understand and I am going to be briefing the people that I used to brief when I was in the AF. So all the real difference will be my attire and my nail varnish colour (*waves bronze coloured nails*) (*laughter*)...”.

To fully understand the nail varnish reference one needs to understand the metalinguistics (Bakhtin, 1984) behind this comment. Here humour lies in the Dress Regulations<sup>16</sup> in the military

*To this day I still do not like to wear coloured nail varnish and once on holiday (while still serving) I got quite upset when I tried a bright red colour to the extent I had to have it immediately removed. Needless to say my civilian friends I was holidaying with didn't understand what was wrong with me. But the colour was so alien, so not me*

which do not permit females or males to wear coloured nail varnish when in uniform, the opportunity to do so represents disassociation from the military.

Maria's assurances against the uncertainty of liminality are drawn from the familiarity of her past and future jobs. This has been highlighted in other research with many ex-service people joining uniformed professions such as the police or prison service (Higate, 2001), reflecting their need to work in an organization with discipline and authority. However, research concentrated on junior ranks<sup>17</sup> in the Army. The need for familiarity has a further practical application through the recognition of the value of a particular set of skills and experience. Working within the wider defence industry, commercial or civil service, is an uncomplicated way to understand commercial worth.

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<sup>16</sup> Uniform Dress & Appearance Regulations for the Royal Air Force. AP1358 Chp 1 0156. Nail Varnish & Cosmetics.

<sup>17</sup> Members of the Armed Services at the rank of Corporal or below.

"The job I am doing is ideal for me to transition into Civvy Street because I am working with what I know from the military but in a commercial environment ... So that is a really good steady building block ... (Paul, potential MoD contractor)

"I will do anything and I know I will get a job because the areas we are looking in ... have all got big defence contractors and programme management offices, so that I am not worried about." (Patrick)

Here Lisa discusses how it felt when she put her CV out to commercial companies;

"a bit like when you put something into auction are you going to get higher or lower than your estimate price? And I did kind of think has the Air Force valued me at the right level? ..... I would like to see if I am only a Flt Lt of the RAF or if I can do more than that which I think I can." (Lisa)

Contrasting this with how the female participants discuss their future employment the male participants feel no need to deliberate on how they will operate or be perceived, taking for granted perhaps their masculine style of working will be accepted in the civilian world while the female participants raise this as an issue. For Claire, who had taken up, on paper, an equivalent MoD Civil Service job on leaving the RAF the experience of working in a familiar, (remaining part of the MoD), yet alien (civil service environment) has been frustrating.

"I have now started my new job and I am adjusting, adjusting to just being a C2." (Claire)

What does it feel like? (Interviewer)

"It was very difficult it feels as if I am having my wings clipped, when I said jokingly I am accepting mediocracy I don't think I truly accepted what I was saying. Whereas I am now facing that mediocracy, I can't fart, sorry I can't pass wind without passing it through my C1." (Claire)

Here Claire differentiates herself from the other, the mediocre, in this case the civil service. Claire feels she had more freedom in the RAF, a TI, than she does in the civil service, an institution. She goes on to explain:

"I thought it would be a very easy transition but I am working with people who, who really aren't rushing, they are fannying around over details that don't really matter and then they are going down rabbit holes that really ought not to matter but suddenly they do and before you know it 3 weeks have been gone by and there is no slight hint of an answer whereas I want to get people in a room and shake them up and go for "God's sake this is easy" and I think it's that I think people are seeing me, civil servants are seeing me a sqn ldr still. But I haven't got the rank and they are waiting for me to calm down but I don't think I can cause this is me. So whether or not I am suitable to be a C2 in the long run is, we will see." (Claire)

Like fitting a square peg into a round hole how Claire views herself and how she is viewed by others is at odds with the normative values of the working environment. The concept of military identity, classified by Woodard and Jenkins (2011) as an individual that takes action, is how Claire feels she is being judged and continues to see herself post military. Not all leavers break away from the military and with the recent expansion of the reserve forces many more opportunities are available for ex-military to return to service without some of the disadvantages, e.g. moving, detachments. Although Lisa explored jobs outside defence she has secured a job in the RAF Reserves. The financial implications are significantly in favour of Civvy Street and yet;

“I feel obligated to take the reserve job because I said I would, and that part of my military kind of background ethos I don’t think it will ever go away.” (Lisa)

This sense of duty and obligation to an organization she has previously indicated has let her down is contradictory in nature and reflects the almost cultish nature of the military. One of the most memorable statements that came out of the interviews was from Lyndsey (Interview 7), she simply said, “It’s a cult. We need to be deprogrammed”. It is no wonder then leaving the military is met with a mixture of emotions and concerns.

“... and the fact that I hope that people will listen as much to me in this uniform (*gestures to current attire of civilian clothes*) as much as they did in the blue uniform. But that will be up to me how I approach things” (Maria)

“The things that I am worried about in terms of fitting are ... I had a little bit of experience with this when I worked with ... none military and I did struggle a little bit, I must confess because I am very much, when you say you are going to be some where you turn up when you say you are going to do something you do it that kind of mentality ... they always seemed to be having chats and I find that quite frustrating because, just do it! ... I can't be doing with procrastination and constant updates on everything and trying to find that level I think I might find that quite alien and that is what I am worried about ...” (Lisa)

There are here hints of a need to reassess identity, from the military professional who likes to get things done and take action to the recognition they may have to adapt.

“Am I too aggressive in my behaviour? Am I too military? So I do get irritated when we say we are going to do something then 3 days later we are still talking about it. That kind of thing I think I will find frustrating, but obviously I am going to have to adapt how I behave whilst also ensuring that all the things I have told them I am good at don't get eroded.” (Lisa)

So you think you need to change? (Interviewer)

“Oh God yeh I do, because if I continue with in the same vein as I have been in the last 2-3 weeks I won't win friends and I won't influence people. There has



got to be another way to influence that culture change but me being just me as I am coming in, I don't think that will work." (Claire)

Participants are not just concerned about how they will be perceived but also the practicalities of civilian work life.

"I don't know whether I'm going to get board because after 2 years in a tour we all like to move on and do something different and I don't know if I can keep Earthworks fresh enough" (Jennifer)

"What if I get a nasty boss? That bothers me because at the moment if you do get a nasty boss, you ... know that they are going to move on or you are going to move on 18 months .... and you can cope with crap for 18 months and what bothers me is if I don't get a boss I liked ... there is no getting away from it. You either put up hope they leave or you are going to have to leave." (Maria)

Through these narratives participants have been able to anticipate some of the challenges they may face when they leave; boredom, personality clashes, culture, if not exactly how they will deal with these challenges.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings**

As previously stated Bakhtin (1984), believed discourse could not be studied outside of its culture. This does not mean specific meaning cannot be understood outside of its own culture but in research terms it is the job of the researcher to explain that meaning. In this respect the narrative of military personnel could puzzle civilians as their norms are different and it is these I hope to explain. The military is not apart from the society it serves, it needs the support of the society as do service personnel when leaving the military. In order to facilitate further understanding of military personnel, their motivations and their experiences of liminality the following findings are proposed.

Individuals can be influenced through family links to join the RAF, (Hines and Cameron, 2006) with emotional labour being invested even before the individual joins the organisation, but the RAF then becomes an extended family through the blurring of home and work. Whilst this can be resisted through maintaining links to civilian friends and living outside of the military environment the influence of these emotional ties can be significant.

While adventure can reflect the agentic nature of military personnel, their desire for challenge, action and immediacy (Walker, 2012), when age and family responsibilities come to bare professional, family and personal desires become contested resulting in conflated senses of identity; 'I am an officer, I am a mother,

I am a father, I am old'. The decision to leave is made and the individual's perception of themselves as an officer is questioned and distancing occurs;

"I ... effectively called myself a civvi in waiting" (Claire)

"And I also came to various views about the Air Force ... I saw a huge change coming up and I have always been able to deal with the change but ... I've done my time that is enough." (Patrick)

The emotional decision to leave then is contextual with participants recalling it as 'easy', 'nice', feelings of 'elation' and 'horrific'. But this is just the first step on the liminal experience. Liminality recalled in the narratives reflect that found in other research with participants describing themselves as 'in a cloud', experiencing 'hiatus', 'in that period of transition ... craving stability' and 'quite bizarre'. How the participants will feel on the 'other side' of this liminality and how they get there are questions that still need to be researched.

What is evidenced is even in the confines of a TI members are able to resist its pernicious controls, whether by choosing not to live in military accommodation, undertake secondary duties, play the game or ultimately leave the organisation. Conversely while participants rely on the institution to make decisions for them and accept control over their lives that civilians would find unacceptable women also seem to experience a sense of freedom within the organisation that is not necessarily found outside, from Claire's clipped wings to the liberating effect of the uniform.

This does not mean that a masculine culture does not exist, for these are demonstrated in the attitudes towards motherhood and promotion. However, the masculine nature of the organisation is rarely acknowledged negatively except by Lisa who wanted her bosses to “stop acting like an excerpt from the 1950s” and move away from the “old boys club”. It can be argued women in the military have an egalitarian perception of ‘game playing’ compared to their female colleagues outside the military this perception is not necessarily reproduced across all female officers or by females in the junior ranks and it appears to have limits, despite this it is an interesting phenomena.

Post military careers for officers, unlike their junior colleagues who tend towards uniformed professions, incline towards defence industry jobs, perhaps reflecting their education, professional status and industry familiarity. Any residual sense of loyalty to the RAF versus commercial reality will be an interesting test of future identity constructs.

Attitudes and behaviour which were acceptable even celebrated in the military are not necessarily appreciated in the same way outside but this is felt most keenly in the female narrative; Lisa and Maria who have yet to experience civilian workplace anticipate issues; ‘Am I too military, am I too aggressive?’ (Lisa). It’s up to me [how I am viewed]. (Maria). While Claire working within a civil service environment has already felt pressure to change. These concerns/experiences were not reflected in the male participants’ interviews.

While revealing on many levels not all the research aims have been met, reflecting the exploratory nature of the research and the position of the

participants in the leaving process. Questions 1 and 3 were answered as military personnel undertake identity work, both affirming their military identity and imagining their civilian selves through narrative sense-making. They also distance themselves from the RAF both metaphorically and physically enabling reflexivity to take place. Question 2, the effects of a TI, are only hinted at in the data due to the participants temporal positioning in the liminal process. But there are indications that the leaning towards jobs in the defence industry or RAF Reserves means that the military identity will be difficult to leave behind.

The aim here has not been to extend male/female dualism but masculine/feminine stereotypes have been useful in understanding the narratives of the participants especially when they have not conformed to type. Interestingly there was little reference to an anticipated loss of status from the participants, in contrast to Walker's (2012) research and Goffman's expectations (1961). Limitations of space also excluded the ritualistic element of liminality to be explored. This research context defined as a masculine TI undergoing a culture change as a result of societal pressures from gender equality and diversity has resulted in rich themes which it is intended to further explore; from work/life balance, unconscious gender discrimination, colonisation of the self, liminal identities and the effects of a TI. It is hoped that the findings so far are merely a precursor to further research.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Interview Questions**

Example of questions which will be asked during the semi-structured interviews.

1. Why did you join the Royal Air Force?
2. When did you start to think about leaving the Royal Air Force?
  - a. Why are you leaving?
  - b. What did making that decision feel like?
3. Describe your most challenging job?
4. What sort of things kept you awake at night?
5. What sort of things keep you awake at night now?
6. What has been the greatest challenge to your career progression?
7. If you had a magic wand what would you change?

Prompts will include things like “can you give me an example or “how did that make you feel”.

Appendix B

Participant Information

Name	M/F	Rank	Age	Length of service	Specialisation	Status	Children	Accommodation	Interview
Lisa	F	JO	30-45	ten to twenty	Gp 1	M	Y	Q	F
Claire	F	SO	30 -45	ten to twenty	Gp 2	CP	Y	H	S
Patrick	M	SO	30 -45	ten to twenty	Gp 2	M	Y	Q	F
Paul	M	SO	46 - 55	30 plus	Gp 2	W	Y	Q	F
Jennifer	F	SO	30 - 45	ten to twenty	Gp 1	M	Y	H	S
Maria	F	SO	46 - 55	30 plus	Gp 2	M	Y	B	S

Index									
Rank		JO	Junior Officer - Pilot Officer, Flying Officer, Flight Lieutenant						
		SO	Senior Officer - Squadron Leader, Wing Commander, Group Captain						
Specialisation		Gp 1	Police, Regiment, Aircrew, Operations Support, Engineering						
		Gp 2	Administration including Physical Training						
Status		M	Married						
		W	Widower						
		CP	Civil Partner						
Accommodation*		Q	Quarter						
		H	Home						
		B	Both						
Interview		F	Face to Face						
		S	Skype						

\*At time of interview.

Appendix C

Participants Timeline

Jennifer	months - 18	months - 3	months -1	D Day		Claire	months + 2	Paul	months + 2	Susan	months + 10
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Notes:

Jennifer remains a ? As she has not definitely decided to leave the RAF at this point.  
Susan is included here as although her full interview has not been used one of her quotes has been used.  
As @ July 2016.



## Appendix D

### Example of Consent Form



The Open  
University

#### Marching Towards Civvy Street Exploring Liminality in Transitioning Military Personnel

##### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CONSENT FORM:

participant serial number:

##### Consent to be interviewed by Primary Investigator: Please initial boxes below

I confirm that I have read / had read to me the leaflet, about this research project and I understand the content.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and written out word-for-word later. The recording will be securely stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

I understand that anything I say will be treated confidentially and only used for research purposes, in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

I agree to take part in the Marching Towards Civvy Street Exploring Liminality in Transitioning Military Personnel research study

All participants will be anonymous. Participants can withdraw any time up to 7 Aug 2016 without providing a reason.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of researcher

Date

Signature

**1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher**

## Appendix E-1

### Example of Information Leaflet



The Open University

The Open University is a world leader in teaching and research. We design, carry out, and analyse, research studies in the fields of organisational studies and management change.

#### The Research Team:

Primary Investigator Caroline Micklewright  
Supervisors  
Dr Caroline Clarke  
Dr Cinzia Priola

#### Our responsibilities to you:

- We ensure your safety: all our researchers carry photographic identification.
- We guard your privacy: your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contribution will be used for research purposes only. Nobody will be individually identified in the final report.
- We respect your wishes: participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to.
- We answer your questions: we will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

#### Marching Toward Civvy Street Exploring Liminality in Transitioning Military Personnel

Research study: exploring participants' experiences of identity in relation to the transition from the Military to Civilian world.



The Open University

*The Open University is leading this research, exploring your experience of receiving the services of The Open University Business School.*

**This leaflet provides you with further information about the study.**

It is also available in large print, braille or tape.

## Appendix E -2

**What is the aim of this research?**

**We are asking for your help with important research about individual experiences of serving personnel as they transition out of the military.**

The Open University and this project aims to explore identity and liminality as personnel transition from the military into wider society. The aim is to affect understanding of the transition process for the benefit of military personnel and wider society.

**What is involved?**

We are interested in finding out the experiences of individuals who have served in the Armed Forces. We have been asked to conduct interviews with people about their experiences.

Interviews will involve a researcher talking to you for about one hour. The interview will be audio recorded so that we can be sure that we correctly remember everything that you tell us. We will work around you to arrange a venue and time convenient to you for this interview.

We will be conducting this research in June/July 2016.

**Is it confidential?**

Yes. Everything that you tell the interviewer will be in confidence. Pseudonyms will be used. No personal information will be passed to anyone outside the research team. This includes the military. We will write a report of the study but no individual will be identifiable from the published results of the research.

**What happens now?**

We will contact you again soon to ask for your consent to take part in the research and to arrange an appointment to come and see you. In the meantime, if you have any queries at all about the study, please contact the principle researcher [caroline.micklewright@open.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.micklewright@open.ac.uk)

**What if I have other questions?**

**If you have any other questions, we would be happy to answer them. Please contact:**

**Caroline Micklewright**

**What will I be asked?**

We will ask you to talk about the following broad topics:

- Your individual circumstances and experiences of leaving the Armed Services.
- Your experiences of deciding to leave the Armed Forces and your transition into Civvy Street.
- 

**Do I have to take part?**

No. We are relying on your voluntary co-operation. No one is taking part in this study who does not want to. Even if you say yes to begin with, you are free to withdraw at any time up to 7 August 2016. To withdraw please contact [claire.wyde@open.c.uk](mailto:claire.wyde@open.c.uk).

## Appendix F

### Coding

Coding took place as follows:

As one of the most identifying aspects of an individual's identity, was divided into Junior Officer (JO) Flight Lieutenant or Senior Officer (SO) Squadron Leaders or above. Specializations/Branches were categorized into 2 groups broadly reflecting what Alvesson and Billing, 1992, p. 92) referred to as the "gendered image" of work areas in organizations. Although not clear cut these groupings enable the anonymity of the participants and reflect predominately male/female specializations:

- Group 1 Engineering, Police, Regiment <sup>18</sup> and Aircrew, Air Operations (Air Traffic Control, Operations Support and Battle Managers). Masculine specialisations.
- Group 2 Logistics (including catering), Administration (including Admin Trainer and Physical Education Instructor) Medical and legal. Feminine specialisations.

Jobs/roles were classed as Command or Staff in line with RAF nomenclature and understanding where Command roles are roles where the individual has responsibility for people and output in direct support of operations. Staff jobs are roles confined to Head Quarters or supportive and are

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<sup>18</sup> The RAF Regiment, as a front line combat unit, is currently the only specialization not open to women in the RAF.

administrative in nature. RAF Station names, counties and deployments were generalized in order to maintain anonymity. Finally length of service was referred to in the following general terms; less than 10 years, 10 - 20 years and over 20 years. It is expected having taken these precautions identifying individuals' gender will not jeopardize their anonymity. This is important because gender is crucial to one of the key objectives of the research project in exploring experience of females in leaving a masculine dominated TI.

## Annex G

### Autobiography

I nearly didn't make it into the RAF. Initial Officer training is supposed to take 6 months, it took me 12 to graduate. I got through the basic induction module then spent 2 months on the Medical and Special Holding Flight because of my dodgy knees, I then reached the end of the course but was recoursed 4 months and had to do most of it again. At this point I also faced an administrative board as 'they', the training officers, thought I was not good enough to graduate (this would have meant being kicked out of the RAF), I received a negative sheet 3 (administrative action) for being incorrectly dressed (I only owned one suit and didn't want to spoil it so walked round camp without a jacket before we were issued our uniform), a laudatory sheet 3 for bravery during the Field Leadership Exercise and more restrictions (this involves extra parades twice a day 0700 hrs and 2200 hrs) for minor misdemeanours than any other person on my squadron. When I finally graduated I intended to tell them to stick their job as I felt I had been subjected to bullying. My official report read "Brennan (my maiden name) is short, wears glasses and is from the North East of England." I was told my accent was a problem as people wouldn't be able to understand me and that "I could not command the respect of my seniors, peers or subordinates". On my graduation day my suspicions were confirmed when our squadron Flight Sergeant caught up with me and told me he was proud of me. Feeling shocked and emboldened by a couple of glasses of bubbly I asked him why he had picked on me. I was ordered

to give you a hard time he said, and I could have been a lot harder but chose not to.

Obviously I decided to stay in the RAF after graduation, it turned out to be a lot of fun and paid quite well but for years I would drive past RAF Cranwell (where Initial Officer Training takes place) with my middle finger extended. I explain this because after fighting so hard to get in it was a very difficult decision to leave. All the experience and knowledge I had gained over 16 years, the blood, sweat and tears I had shed to prove I was good enough. It was and remains hard to let go. My husband is still a serving officer and the truth is as long as he remains in the RAF so to a greater extent will I. So many of our decisions, where to live, where to send the children to school are dependent on his job. I was a good officer, I was never going to climb to the highest ranks as I was too predisposed to speak my mind but nevertheless I felt I made a difference in a small way and my opinion was respected. But I did not want to deploy for 6 months and leave my children. I could have got out of it, got medically exempt from deployment, downgraded because of those knees, but I felt then and still do that if you want the rank, if you want the money, if you want the responsibility then you have to do the job and part of the job is going away. On leaving the RAF and suddenly finding myself standing at the school gates amongst the hubbub, turning 40 I thought is this it? I never fitted into any of the mother's groups talking about the best nappies and baby bottles, my girlfriends used to be able to talk about lipstick and nail varnish forever while I wanted to talk about international politics. I'd rather be outside than sitting at a desk. Who am I now without that rank to lean on? What

am I going to do with the rest of my life? Being a full time stay at home mam is not an option and I can see the look in the eyes of my former colleagues "What are you doing now Caroline?", that is if they even bother to speak to me at all! And so here I am, the apple not dropping far from the tree researching the military but still challenging myself, I hope, in a new discipline. And the best thing is that my 'new' civilian friends, who I met at the school gates, are going to take me out for a drink when I hand this in. My husband, currently deployed overseas, promises to take me out to celebrate on his return, only another 4 months to wait .....



*I recently answered my front door to an older gentleman touting for his window cleaning business. We got chatting "you are not from here" he noted picking up on my accent, 'no' I said feeling quite comfortable (if there is a disconnect between military and civilian it is as much because the military don't talk as much as civilians don't ask). 'We've ended up here because my husband is in the military'. 'Oh I was a lance-jack, Chef', he said. I said 'I was a RAF supplier'. He asked what rank I was and I said a Squadron Leader, what's that he said laughing. I translated into Army speak and he drew himself to attention and threw up a salute. I returned his salute and now have a window cleaner, (which was desperately needed). I tell this story to demonstrate the ingrained nature of the military. Confronted with an officer (and obviously wanting my business) this gentleman, some 25 years after leaving the Army felt it was perfectly acceptable to salute me on my doorstep, whilst all done in jest I think it demonstrates how the military gets into your blood. It will be interesting to see how the participants adjust to military life, I feel I have hardly touched on some of the issues and I am finding the research fascinating. I have laughed, I have cried and I have joked with my participants. Detached I am not and I did not anticipate the emotional context of this research. Nevertheless I have tried to provide a view which I hope reflects my participant's perspective while linking to theory and offering alternative views.*

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